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Cuts Limit Adult School Programs

By ALLIE BIDWELL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER
Tuesday, February 9, 2010
Category: News > City > Local Schools

Correction Appended

For Berkeley Adult School student and Thai immigrant Chuenkamol Marrone, the school's English As A Second Language program has been vital to her job search in America.

"I want to learn the basic things the students here learn compared to my country," she said. "I need to know how things work in this country, and it will be good for me to know what I can do."

But an ongoing state fiscal crisis may make the basics increasingly more difficult to teach.

Marrone, 48, earned a business degree in Thailand before arriving in Berkeley but found that acquiring a job proved nearly impossible because she did not speak English.

Though some students like Marrone enroll in ESL courses to improve their job prospects, state budget cuts have forced the Berkeley Unified School District to scale back a number of programs at the adult school, including the ESL program, which is seeing a reduction in the number of classes.

The adult school took a \$1.6 million cut from its \$5.4 million budget in 2009-10, according to adult school Principal Sterling Bruner. As a result, the school is no longer offering summer courses, has reduced its staff and has begun charging a registration fee for immigrant students.

And with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed \$6.3 billion cut to K-12 education for the upcoming fiscal year, the district will see an additional \$2.7 million reduction, further adding to the \$20 million in cut funding the district has sustained in the last five years.

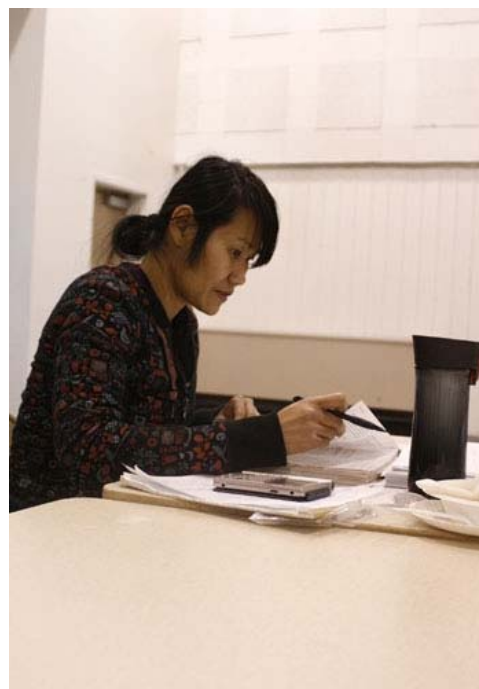
"It's hard to say how much we will be affected by statewide budget cuts," Bruner said. "Our board and superintendent are very supportive but have been put in a position by the state to make fiscal choices that may be deemed unpopular."

Evelyn Fujimoto, a coordinator for the Berkeley Adult School Independent Study Program, said charging immigrant students the \$30 registration fee-normally reserved for all other students-is unprecedented.

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ALLYSE BACHARACH/PHOTO
Chuenkamol Marrone, 48, enrolled in Berkeley Adult School's ESL program to help her job prospects. Many programs, including ESL, have been scaled back due to budget cuts.

Podcast »

Cuts to adult education

Reporter Allie Bidwell talks to a Berkeley Adult School student and an independent study coordinator about the effects of budget cuts to the Berkeley Unified School District.

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"It's pretty cheap, but for some it's a hardship because they just don't have the funds," she said.

Marrone said the registration and class fees for business courses may become a burden for her in the future.

"I feel uncomfortable if they're going to charge more money," she said. "For \$20 or \$30 per class, I'd be happy to pay, but any more than that, I have to be thinking about doing something else."

Though California Proposition 98 requires a minimum percentage of the state budget-roughly 40 percent-to be spent on K-14 education, District Spokesperson Mark Coplan said the fluctuating economy makes funding for education uncertain.



"It should protect us, but the economy has dropped, so Prop. 98 dollars are less," Coplan said.

According to Berkeley Board of Education President Karen Hemphill, the board has not made any final decisions regarding the budget cuts, but she said the board's staff is developing recommendations to be reviewed by the Budget Advisory Committee.

Adult school student Marvin Watson, 20, said he was attracted to the school because it is "community-based" and has "a city feel." But he added that the increased fees may be deterring some students from enrolling.

"Most people here are of different ethnicity," he said. "They want to learn to read and write, and most schools don't have that. But

here they do, so everyone comes here. So when they give (the school) less money, less people come, and we don't want that. I don't want that."

Tags: BUSD, BERKELEY ADULT SCHOOL

Correction: Tuesday, February 9, 2010

An earlier version of the photo caption accompanying Tuesday's article "Cuts Limit Adult School Programs" incorrectly stated that Chuenkamol Marrone is 49. In fact, she is 48.

The Daily Californian regrets the error.

Contact Allie Bidwell at abidwell@dailycal.org.

Comments (2) »

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Echo 2 Items

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Peter Hubbard

Thank you for the nicely written article about the dilemma Berkeley Adult School faces.

I'd like to point out that BAS also provides courses in our Commercial & Technical Education curriculum. As well, BAS is a continuation school for adults who wish to earn a high school diploma or G.E.D. Additionally, each year BAS graduates two classes of CNA's in their Certified Nurses Assistant program, trains Emergency Medical Technicians, provides U.S. Citizenship classes, and awards Microsoft Computer Repair & Networking Certifications. There are plans to have fee based ESL courses this spring and next year, and they will be quite costly, even prohibitive, for many students. To get a comprehensive picture of all that we do, please visit our website at BAS.Berkeley.net.

With regard to our budget crisis, it is important to know that because of a change in educational funding law this year, school districts now are able to invoke "discretionary" privileges in appropriating funds from adult schools. Last year, the Board of Supervisors approved some \$600,000 be taken from the BAS budget, whereas historically adult school budgets have been funded "categorically," and have not been vulnerable to such fund reductions.

It is not arguable that K-12 classes are also suffering a budget crisis. As a matter of fairness, though, it would good of BUSD to at

least apprise BAS (its students, teachers, staff, & administration) how the transfers of funds have been/will be used.

Sincerely,

Peter Hubbard

Instructor, BAS

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